

Our uniformed men and women gave great service to our nation by ending a tyrant's reign and fostering elections in a region that only knew dictatorship. In my judgment, the time for military action led by American or British forces is ending and the Iraqi stage should be delivered to the new local leaders to work out their own differences.

I support the House resolution that recommends against the troop surge. The United States should increase the responsibilities of the elected Iraqi government to solve its own problems, while reducing the number of American combat troops sent overseas.

I did not come to this conclusion lightly. The long-term security of our country depends on the United States not being defeated in the Middle East. To prevent a collapse of democracy, tolerance and our supporters in that region, we should implement a new plan that relies on America's key strengths, building support among all our citizens and allies.

Looking back in the last years, our troops in Iraq achieved two major objectives. First they ended the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, a leader who invaded two separate United Nations member countries and ordered the murder of several hundred thousand Iraqis. Second, they backed the United Nations and its sponsorship of Iraq's three national elections that approved a new constitution and government. Iraq is no longer a military threat to her neighbors or minorities – especially Kurdish families – who no longer fear that a third genocide campaign will be launched by their very own government. These are major achievements worthy of the bravery and sacrifice of Americans in uniform.

Iraq now faces new challenges that should be solved by Iraqis – not the U.S. military. Iraq's government, lead by a Kurdish President and a Shia Prime Minister, face a daunting enemy, composed of people who would restore the old dictatorship or worse. This struggle is primarily political, not military. Foreign troops – be they American, British or otherwise – are not well-suited to advance the elected government's writ.

In the coming months, we should build a longer-term plan for the United States and our allies in the Middle East. Man-for-man, Iraqi combat troops operating under the authority of their own elected government are better suited for this mission than Americans for the front lines of Iraq. The U.S. military does offer unique advantages to the Iraqi government in our ability to provide the Iraqi Army and Police with logistics, communications, training and intelligence. Over the coming months, Americans should be focused on these missions, making our Iraqi allies more effective in extending the authority of the elected government. By winding down the combat duties of Americans, we will dramatically lower the risk to our men and women stationed overseas while still providing a decisive advantage to Iraq's elected government. This is how to win the battle to secure a lasting democratic government for the Iraqi people.

Our plan should be strengthened by a major diplomatic initiative among Iraq's neighbors and the World Bank to support the elected government's plans for reconstruction. To date, the World Bank has been absent without leave in Iraq, despite Iraq's status as a founding member of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank's official title). Our effort, based on key American advantages while reducing the number of American combat troops, will improve the prospects for peace and build support for our goals here and among our

allies. I join with many numbers today to say that if it were up to us, we recommend a different course of action that involves less risk to Americans.

As a military man, I am fully aware that the Constitution does not place 535 Members of Congress in the military chain-of-command. Americans who wear the uniform are also not shy in discussing various courses of action. They have as many opinions on various options as any civilian community.

That is their birthright as Americans.

But as volunteers who wear the uniform, they take on an additional heavy obligation to make a decision, to bring an end to debate and confront the enemies of the United States as brothers and sisters united by a common bond.

In the coming days, our troops will face danger, not as Democrats, Independents or Republicans, but as Americans. We in Congress should draw on their strength that once the decision is made. When a course of action is set, we are not neutral in the contest. If Americans are engaged in combat, we are for the Americans winning. We will give them the tools to bring an end to the conflict as rapidly as possible. The debate in Congress will soon close and the course will be set. For those Americans who serve farthest from home, they should know that after a vigorous debate, their democracy will make a decision, and back those men and women charged with its implementation with everything needed to succeed.